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USING CHILDREN'S BOOKS TO DEVELOP READING SKILLS

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Numerous children's books are available to enhance language growth and to develop reading and writing skills. These books can be coordinated with basal reader programs and are appropriate for use with both small and large groups and with individual students. We will discuss ideas in these categories: multiple meanings, skills reinforcement, repetition of sounds, patterned language, and interest in words. A number of the recommended books, however, are representative of more than one area. A bibliography, by category, is included at the end of this article.

Multiple Meanings

Several children's books emphasize multiple meanings of words and phrases. Fred Gwynne's The King Who Rained (1970), A Chocolate Moose for Dinner (1976), and The Sixteen Hand Horse (1980) present homonyms in an entertaining way. Both the sentences and pictures in these books depict the wrong meanings for the words or phrases. For example, in The King Who Rained, there is a picture of a child holding a huge train engine, with the caption "My big sister's getting married and she says I can hold up her train."

Multiple meanings are also humorously presented in the Amelia Bedelia series by Peggy Parish. Amelia Bedelia is the mixed-up maid who literally interprets all of her instructions. When told to "go fly a kite" she does just that; she "pots the plants" in kitchen pots, and makes a "sponge cake" from real sponges. Students might enjoy thinking of additional examples of words with more than one meaning, and developing their own books based on those by Gwynne and Parish.

In What Is a Seal? (Behrens, 1975), photographs in color illustrate two meanings for words. In the text a question is posed and answered: "What is a park? We have a picnic in the park. I park my bike at school." In similar fashion, Nailheads and Potato Eyes (Basil, 1976) deals with various meanings of words associated with body parts. For example, terms such as "head," "arm" and "elbow" are discussed in different contexts.

Simple rhymed verses utilize homonym pairs of varying difficulty in Your Ant Is a Which (Hunt, 1975). Homonyms placed next to each other form the basis for nonsense sentences in a more complicated book How a Horse Grew Hoarse on the Site Where He Sighted a Bare Bear (Hanlon 1976). Not only are these books helpful for building meaning vocabulary, but are also excellent for developing children's concepts.

Skills Reinforcement

A few children's books are available which assist with the review of basic skills. Basil's Breakfast in the Afternoon (1979) defines various compound words and explains how they are put together. "Tiptoe", for example, is shown as tip + toe and explained "When you want to move without making a sound, you walk on the tips of your toes. You tiptoe!" There are opportunities to involve children in the reading of the text as it asks for the first or last parts of compound words to be identified ("? + day = what each of us has once a year").

All Butterflies (1974), an alphabet book by Marcia Brown, offers a rudimentary introduction to alphabetical order. Exquisite woodcuts illustrate such phrases as "All Butterflies," "Cat Dance," and "Elephants Fly?"

A series of books by Hanson provides examples of several different skills through appealing cartoon-like illustrations. Included in the series are these titles: Plurals (1979), Possessives (1979), Antonyms (1972), Homonyms (1972), Synonyms (1972), Similes (1976), Homographs (1972), and Homographic Homophones (1973). Although text is limited, varying levels of difficulty are presented. In Plurals, both regular and irregular forms are included, such as "pig-pigs," "glass-glasses" "baby-babies," and "mouse-mice." Similarly, in Possessives, singular and plural examples are given, such as "monkey's banana-monkeys' bananas." Spelling changes are also incorporated, as in "puppy's bone-puppies' bones." Similes utilizes more text and humorously depicts "like" and "as" comparisons that are related in some way, for example, "Jake works like a beaver. Jan is slow as a turtle." and "Diane shakes like a leaf. Her cousin Jill grows like a weed."

Maestro's On the Go (1979) reinforces the concept of adjectives. Humorous illustrations tell the story of two circus performers who go on a vacation. The only text is a single adjective per page. The book may also be helpful with a review of antonyms, as the left and right-hand pages frequently illustrate opposite pairs.

Fast-Slow, High-Low (1972) by Peter Spier uses only

illustrations to show opposite meanings in a multitude of contexts. For example, "high-low" is depicted by high and low diving boards, chest drawers, slides, tree branches, fences, chairs, high-heeled and low-heeled shoes, mountains and valleys, and high and low notes of a musical scale. The variety of concepts presented in these books enhance their utility for review of the basic skills at several grade levels.

Repetition of Sounds

Books that emphasize the repetition of sounds in the text may be helpful in the development of auditory discrimination and phonics skills. Although it is intended to be a counting book, One Old Oxford Ox (1977) by Nicola Bayley makes extensive use of repetition of sounds in the text. Alliterative phrases such as "five frippery Frenchmen foolishly fishing for frogs" and "nine nimble noblemen nibbling nectarines" make the book excellent for reading aloud.

Hilgartner's Great Gorilla Grins (1979) is a collection of alliterative descriptions of a variety of animals. The clever verbal patterns such as "Large, lordly lion lounges limply on a limb. Lazy Lord Lion leaves Lady Lioness to land lunch and lovingly launder little lions," are further enhanced by the delightful animal illustrations. The book may also assist with vocabulary development among older students as they deal with such descriptions as "Camels act contentious, cantankerous, and combative, if crossed. But consistent concerned care can create cooperation conducive to capable, competent conveying of cargo and kings." Some students may be prompted to work at creative writing based on the format of the text.

Animals and alliterative phrases are also used in Eric Carle's alphabet book, All About Arthur (1974). Arthur, "an absolutely absurd ape," travels across the United States searching for animal friends--"In Denver down by a dingy drugstore he met a dapper Dalmatian dog named Danny." Illustrations give the book visual appeal. The animals are woodcuts in black and white; alphabet forms are photographs of letters in various environmental settings.

In addition to consonant sounds, these books contain examples of consonant blends and digraphs, hard and soft g and c sounds, diphthongs, and both long and short vowel sounds in the text. A possible source of difficulty for beginning readers might be the appearance of different sounds in the same sentence, as in "In Oklahoma he met an odd octopus named Otto, who was eating oysters with onions," found in All About Arthur. Therefore, these books might best be used as reinforcement of previously learned concepts, rather than in

the introduction of letters or sounds.

Two books by Peter Spier, Gobble Growl Grunt (1971) and Crash! Bang! Boom! (1972) explore sounds somewhat differently. Highly detailed illustrations exemplify a text comprised of sounds made by a wide variety of animals and objects from familiar situations. These books are ideal for use with small groups of beginning readers in which the children can dramatize the sounds. Oral language and classification skills may also be further developed.

Patterned Language

There are numerous books for children that use repeated phrases or sentences. The predictable language patterns offer the reader the security of "knowing" the words. These are ideal for beginning readers who are having their first experiences with reading books on their own. Patterned language books also provide excellent stimuli for creative writing for the older readers. Students can work their ideas into the framework of the language of the book. This is particularly good as a confidence-builder for those students who are reluctant to write.

Ipcar's I Love My Anteater With An A (1964) is an alphabet book, although it is probably more appropriate for older students than for children at the readiness level. The text follows a pattern for each letter of the alphabet:

I love my fox with an F because he is
fascinating.
I hate him with an F because he is fickle.
His name is Fernandez. He comes from Formosa.
He lives on figs and fruitcake,
And he is a fire fighter.

There are almost unlimited opportunities for vocabulary study of positive and negative descriptive words, place names, foods and occupations, and animals. The book makes use of many unusual animals, such as bongo, ibex, narwhal, okapi, and xiphias. As students write their own alphabet books following this format, vocabulary development can be extended even further.

The Important Book (1949), by Margaret Wise Brown, reinforces the concepts of paragraph construction, main idea, and supporting details through a simple textual pattern. Various things are described like this:

The important thing about an apple
is that it is round.
It is red. You bite it,
and it is white inside,
and the juice splashes in your face,
and it tastes like an apple,

and it falls off a tree
 But the important thing about an apple
 is that it is round.

Students could select any number of topics for group or individually written stories.

A Scale Full of Fish and Other Turnabouts (1979) by Bossom discusses multiple meanings in a simple pattern that is appealing to children. On facing pages, paired statements, such as "Box in a ring" and "Ring in a box" are illustrated. The title phrase, "A scale full of fish" shows fish being weighed, while the page opposite "A fish full of scales" shows one fish. This book could prompt children to write turnabouts of their own.

The pattern is somewhat complicated in Hutchins' Don't Forget the Bacon! (1976). A young boy is sent to the store with these instructions: "Six farm eggs, a cake for tea, a pound of pears, and don't forget the bacon." However, as he walks along, things that he passes, such as "six fat logs" and a "rake for leaves" and "a pile of chairs" become confused with what he is to buy. As he repeats everything going to and from the store, he finally takes home what was requested, except, he forgot the bacon. This book allows children to manipulate language by writing words and phrases that are similar to the pattern in the text.

The repetitive language in the pattern books varies greatly. Some repeated phrases are almost like a refrain, as in Sendak's Chicken Soup With Rice (1962). In other books, it is the structure of a sentence that is repeated. For example, in An Egg Is To Sit On by Tanz (1978), humorous drawings illustrate this type of sentence structure: "A nose is to wash your back with (turn the page) if you are an elephant" and "A house is to eat for lunch (turn the page) if you are a termite." The wide variety of pattern books provides children at many grade levels an opportunity to enjoy the language and to manipulate it creatively.

Interest in Language

Stimulating an interest in words is often a goal of the classroom reading program. This may be accomplished in part by a study of etymology. Many books are available on word histories that are appropriate for several grade levels. For lower and middle grade students Steckler's 101 Words and How They Began (1979) might be of interest. Common words are categorized into simple groups, such as things that grow, animals, what we wear, things we enjoy, and the like. The derivations of the words are not difficult to read and are often entertaining. Cartoon-like illustrations add to the enjoyment.

Slanguage (1979) by Carothers and Lacey is a delightful collection of common expressions and how they originated. Included are the phrases, "cat's out of the bag" "sick as a dog" "apple pie order" "fit as a fiddle" and many others. Slanguage is an enjoyable source for all ages. Such a book may serve as a springboard for students to interview people of various ages in the community regarding expressions that were popular during their youth.

Another way of creating interest in language is through the use of books that organize words in different ways. Three books by Brian Wildsmith, Birds (1967), Wild Animals (1967), and Fishes (1968), describe groups of animals in almost poetic language. Exquisite paintings illustrate such phrases as "a stare of owls" "a tower of giraffes" and "a hover of trout."

Humorous manipulation of words is also appealing to children of all ages. Juster's The Phantom Tollbooth (1961) and Corbett's The Mysterious Zetabet (1979) make use of clever play on words. And, other books, such as Schwartz's A Twister of Twists, A Tangler of Tongues (1972) and Tremain's Teapot, Switcheroo, and Other Silly Word Games (1979), offer children games to play with oral and written language. Because language development and interests vary among students, books featuring verbal humor should be selected commensurate with the ability of the children to comprehend the text.

Conclusion

Building student interest in books is a vital part of the reading program. However, reading books is often separated from actual reading instruction. This need not be the case. There are many children's books which can assist with the development of basic reading skills and vocabulary as well as creating interest in language and the production of it.

Recommended Books

Multiple Meanings

- Basil, Cynthia. Nailheads and Potato Eyes. Morrow, 1976
- Behrens, June. What Is a Seal? Jay Alden Publ., 1975.
- Gwynne, Fred. The King Who Rained. Windmill, 1970.
- _____. A Chocolate Moose for Dinner. Dutton, 1973.
- _____. The Sixteen Hand Horse. Windmill, 1980.
- Hanlon, Emily. How A Horse Grew Hoarse on the Site Where He Sighted a Bare Bear. Delacorte, 1976
- Hunt, Bernice K. Your Ant Is a Which. Harcourt, 1975.
- Parish, Peggy. Amelia Bedelia. Harper & Row, 1963.
- Thayer, Jane. Try Your Hand. Morrow, 1980.

Skills

- Basil, Cynthia. Breakfast in the Afternoon. Morrow 1979
- Brown, Marcia. All Butterflies. Scribners, 1974.
- Hanson, Joan. Antonyms. Lerner Publications, 1972.
- _____. Homonyms. Lerner, 1972.
- _____. Homographs. Lerner, 1972.
- _____. Synonyms. Lerner, 1972.
- _____. More Antonyms. Lerner, 1973.
- _____. More Homonyms. Lerner, 1973.
- _____. More Synonyms. Lerner, 1973.
- _____. Homographic Homophones. Lerner, 1973.
- _____. Still More Antonyms. Lerner, 1976.
- _____. Still More Homonyms. Lerner, 1976.
- _____. Similes. Lerner, 1976.
- _____. More Similes. Lerner, 1979.
- _____. Plurals. Lerner, 1979.
- _____. Possessives. Lerner, 1979.
- Maestro, Betsy and Guilio. On the Go: A Book of Adjectives. Morrow, 1979.
- Spier, Peter. Fast-Slow, High-Low. Doubleday, 1972.
- Repetition of Sounds
- Bayley, Nicola. One Old Oxford Ox. Atheneum, 1977.
- Brown, Marcia. Peter Piper's Alphabet. Scribners, 1959.
- Carle, Eric. All About Arthur. Watts, 1974.
- Eichenberg, Fritz. Ape in a Cape. Harcourt, 1952.
- Garten, Jan. The Alphabet Tale. Random House, 1964.
- Hanson, Joan. Sound Words. Lerner, 1976.
- _____. More Sound Words. Lerner, 1979.
- Hilgartner, Beth. Great Gorilla Grins. Little, Brown 1979
- Kuskin, Karla. Roar and More. Harper & Row, 1956.
- Spier, Peter. Cobble Growl Grunt. Doubleday, 1971.
- _____. Crash! Bang! Boom! Doubleday, 1972
- Tallon, Robert. Zoophabets. Scholastic, 1979.
- Patterned Sentences
- Barrett, Judi. Animals Should Definitely Not Wear Clothing. Atheneum, 1970.

- Baum, Arline and Joseph. One Bright Sunday Morning. Random House, 1962.
- Bel Geddes, Barbara. So Do I. Young Readers Press, 1975
- _____. I Like To Be Me. Young Readers Press, 1963.
- Bodecker, N.M. Let's Marry Said the Cherry. Atheneum, 1974.
- Bossom, Naomi. A Scale Full of Fish and Other Turnabouts. Greenwillow, 1979.
- Brown, Margaret Wise. The Important Book. Harper & Row, 1949.
- Cameron, Polly. I Can't Said the Ant. Coward-McCann, 1961.
- Charlip, Remy. Fortunately. Parents Magazine Press, 1964
- Hutchins, Pat. Don't Forget the Bacon! Greenwillow, 1976
- _____. Good Night, Owl. Macmillan, 1972.
- Ipcar, Dahlov. I Love My Anteater With An A. Knopf, 1964.
- Krauss, Ruth. Bears. Harper & Row, 1948.
- Martin, Bill, Jr. Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? Holt, 1970.
- Sendak, Maurice. Chicken Soup With Rice. Harper & Row, 1962.
- Tanz, Christine. An Egg Is To Sit On. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1978.
- Zemach, Harve. The Judge. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969
- Zolotow, Charlotte. Do You Know What I'll Do? Harper & Row, 1958.
- _____. Someday. Harper and Row, 1965.
- Interest in Language
- Adelson, Leone. Dandelions Don't Bite: The Story of Words. Pantheon, 1972.
- Carothers, Gibson and Lacey, James. Slanguage. Sterling, 1979.
- Corbett, Scott. The Mysterious Zetabet. Atlantic and Little, 1979.
- Funk, Charles E. & Funk, Charles E., Jr. Horsefeathers and Other Curious Words. Harper & Row, 1958.
- Juster, Norton. Phantom Tollbooth. Random House, 1961.
- Kohn, Bernice. What a Funny Thing To Say! Dial, 1974.
- Longman, Harold. What's Behind the Word. Coward-McCann, 1968.

- Pei, Mario. Words in Sheep's Clothing. Hawthorn, 1969.
- Pickles, Colin and Meynell, Lawrence. Beginnings of Words: How English Grew. Putnam, 1971.
- Rees, Ennis. Pun Fun. Abelard-Schuman, 1965.
- Schwartz, Alvin. Tomfoolery. Lippincott, 1972.
- _____. A Twister of Twists, A Tangler of Tongues. Lippincott, 1977.
- Steckler, Arthur. 101 Words and How They Began. Doubleday, 1979.
- Tremain, Ruthven. Fooling Around With Words. Greenwillow, 1977.
- _____. Teapot, Switcheroo, and Other Silly Word Games. Greenwillow, 1979.
- Wildsmith, Brian. Wild Animals. Watts, 1967.
- _____. Birds. Watts, 1967.
- _____. Fishes. Watts, 1968.